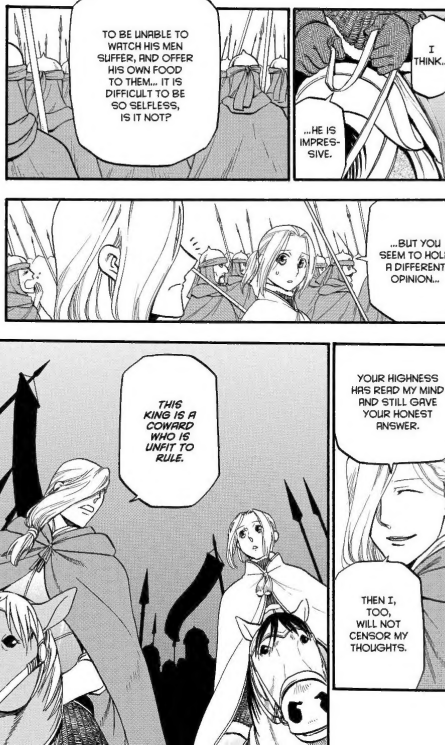
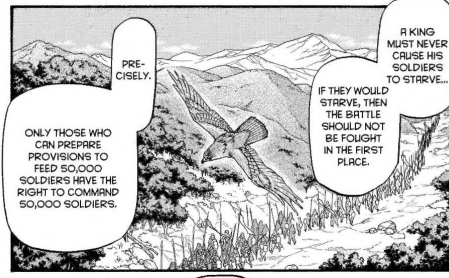
LONG AGO, THERE LIVED A BRAVE KING.
ONCE, THE KING LED 50,000 SOLDIERS ON A CAMPAIGN.
THEY JOURNEYED LONG, PASSING THROUGH THE SNOWY MOUNTAINS ON THE KINGDOM'S BORDERS, FIGHTING BATTLE AFTER BATTLE...
...UNTIL FINALLY, THEIR PROVISIONS WERE DEPLETED.
THE KING, SEEING THEIR SUFFERING AND WEEPING FOR THEM, DISTRIBUTED HIS OWN FOOD AMONG HIS MEN...
THE SOLDIERS STARVED, AND ONE AFTER ANOTHER THEY FELL.

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THIS KING'S ACTIONS...
...YOUR HIGHNESS?
...I THINK HE IS AN IMPRESSIVE KING TO CARE FOR HIS MEN SO...
BUT NARSUS SEEMS CRITICAL OF HIM...


TO BE UNABLE TO WATCH HIS MEN SUFFER, AND OFFER HIS OWN FOOD TO THEM... IT IS DIFFICULT TO BE SO SELFLESS, IS IT NOT?
I THINK...
...HE IS IMPRESSIVE.
...BUT YOU SEEM TO HOLD A DIFFERENT OPINION...
THIS KING IS A COWARD WHO IS UNFIT TO RULE.
YOUR HIGHNESS HAS READ MY MIND AND STILL GAVE YOUR HONEST ANSWER.
THEN I, TOO, WILL NOT CENSOR MY THOUGHTS.

FIRST, THE SIN OF NOT PREPARING SUFFICIENT PROVISIONS FOR 50,000 SOLDIERS, THUS DRIVING THEM TO STARVATION.
SECOND, THE SIN OF DISTRIBUTING HIS OWN FOOD TO A NEGLIGIBLE NUMBER OF HIS MEN, WHILE LEAVING THE GREATER NUMBER OF SOLDIERS TO CONTINUE STARVING.
THE KING COMMITS TWO GRAVE SINS.
WHY ...?
IN SHORT, THIS KING WAS GUILTY OF SLOTH AND UNFAIRNESS.
...
...IT IS CLEARER NOW.
DO YOU UNDER-STAND MY MEANING?
AS SUCH, HE IS A COWARD.
WHAT'S MORE, BY DISTRIBUTING HIS OWN MERGER AMOUNT OF FOOD, HE WAS TRYING TO INTOXICATE HIMSELF WITH HIS OWN BENEVOLENCE AS AN ESCAPE FROM THE RESPONSIBILITY HE BEARS FOR LEAVING MOST OF HIS MEN TO STARVE.

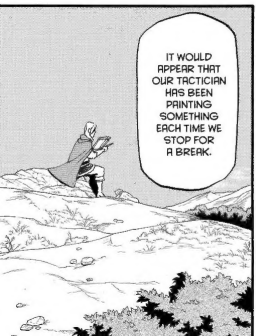

A KING MUST NEVER CAUSE HIS SOLDIERS TO STARVE...
IF THEY WOULD STARVE, THEN THE BATTLE SHOULD NOT BE FOUGHT IN THE FIRST PLACE.
PRE-CISELY.
ONLY THOSE WHO CAN PREPARE PROVISIONS TO FEED 50,000 SOLDIERS HAVE THE RIGHT TO COMMAND 50,000 SOLDIERS.

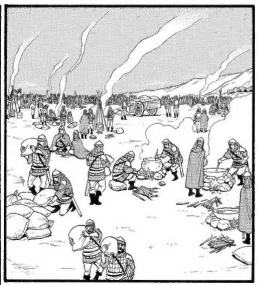
ONLY THEN SHOULD ONE THINK OF TACTICS AND VALOR ON THE BATTLE-FIELD.

ONCE WE CREST THIS HILL, WE WILL COME OUT ON A PLATEAU WITH A GOOD VIEW.
SHALL WE TAKE OUR MEAL THERE, THEN?

YOU ARE AN EXCELLENT GUIDE, JASWANT.
THIS LEG OF OUR MARCH HAS BEEN UNDEMANDING AND QUIET.
THANK YOU.
YES.
WARY OF JASWANT, ARE YOU?
COULD HE BE AN ASSASSIN?
WHAT DO YOU THINK, NARSUS?
DID PRINCE RAJENDRA GIVE US THIS "GUIDE" TO ASSASSINATE HIS HIGHNESS PRINCE ARSLAN?
IT'S FULLY WITHIN THE REALM OF POSSIBILITY.

THE HEROIC LEGEND OF ARSLAN





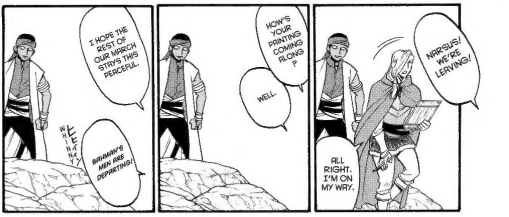
Chapter 44: The Guide in the Dark of Night

IT SEEMS THAT THE FOREIGN SCENERY HAS INSPIRED SIR NARSUS' ARTISTIC HEART.
OH, RIGHT. HE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT BECOMING A COURT PAINTER?

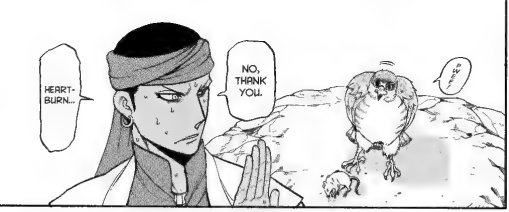
HE MUST BE PLANNING OUR NEXT MOVES.
HE ALSO TAKES UP THE BRUSH WHEN HE IS THINKING.

I HOPE NARSUS WILL PAINT A PORTRAIT OF ME!
OH, PLEASE. IT'S NARSUS. EVEN HIS ART MUST BE AMAZING!
LADY FARRANGIS, YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN HIS ART?
HOW GOOD IS HE?
NEITHER HAVE I, BUT IF HE AIMS TO BE A PRINTER, HE MUST BE RATHER SKILLED, YES?
.....

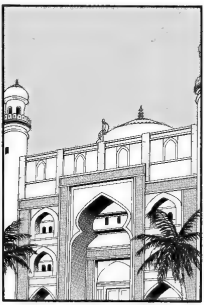
IF SIR NARSUS' GENIUS EXTENDED EVEN TO HIS ART, IT WOULD BE UNBEARABLE!
FOR HIM, THAT LEVEL OF ART IS PERFECT!
...THOSE DO NOT SOUND LIKE WORDS OF PRAISE.
?
YOU TRULY KNOW NO FEAR, DO YOU?
A TACTICIAN PAINTER...?
HOW PECULIAR.
I MUST REPORT EVEN TRIVIAL DETAILS TO MY MASTER...
SNEAK
ZZ


NARSUS! WE'RE LERVANS!
ALL RIGHT. I'M ON MY WAY.
HOW'S YOUR PAINTING COMING ALONG?
WELL.
I HOPE THE REST OF OUR MEETH STEPS THIS PEACEFUL.
KLINK
BRANDY'S MEN ARE DEPARTING!

HAAH?!!
FLAP

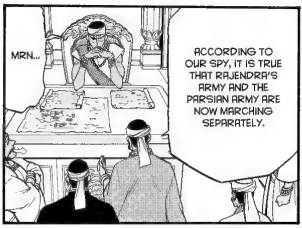

HEART-BURN...
NO, THANK YOU.
PEEP!

RAJENDRA SENT US A TIMETABLE OF ARSLAN'S PLANNED ROUTE VIA A SECRET MESSENGER.

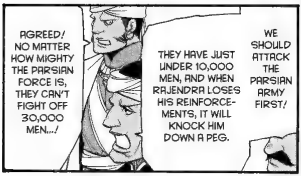


ARSLAN SENT US A TIMETABLE OF RAJENDRA'S PLANNED ROUTE VIA A SECRET MESSENGER.

.....


MRN...
ACCORDING TO OUR SPY, IT IS TRUE THAT RAJENDRA'S ARMY AND THE PARSIAN ARMY ARE NOW MARCHING SEPARATELY.

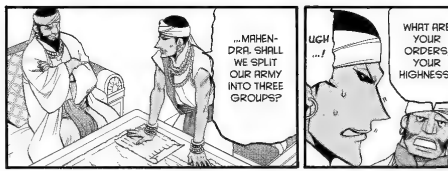
WHAT ARE THEY PLANNING ?!


AGREED! NO MATTER HOW MIGHTY THE PARSIAN FORCE IS, THEY CAN'T FIGHT OFF 30,000 MEN...!
THEY HAVE JUST UNDER 10,000 MEN, AND WHEN RAJENDRA LOSES HIS REINFORCEMENTS, IT WILL KNOCK HIM DOWN A PEG.
WE SHOULD ATTACK THE PARSIAN ARMY FIRST!

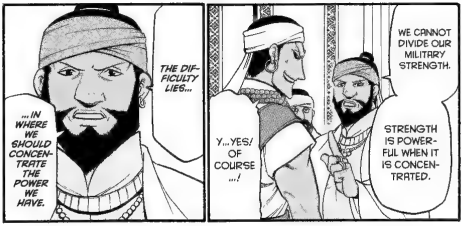
INDEED... THEN DO WE DEAL WITH THEM FIRST AFTER ALL?
WHEN IT COMES TO SPEED, THE PARSIAN HORSEMEN OUTPACE ALL OF THEIR NEIGHBORS!
BUT WHAT IF THE PARSIAN ARMY LAUNCHES A SURPRISE ATTACK ON THE CAPITAL WHILE WE'RE PREOCCUPIED WITH RAJENDRA?!

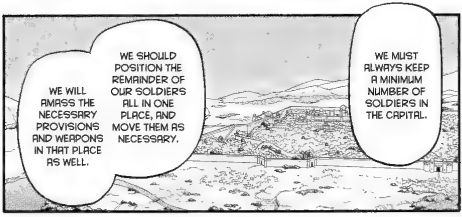
YES, THEN THE PARSIANS WILL BE AS A TREE CUT OFF FROM ITS ROOTS! THEY WILL WITHER AWAY ALL TOO NATURALLY!
NO! FIRST, WE SHOULD MUSTER THE ENTIRETY OF OUR ARMY AND CRUSH RAJENDRA'S MAIN FORCE.

BUT ISN'T THINKING LIKE THAT FALLING INTO THE ENEMY'S TRAP?!
WE WOULD BE PATHETIC TO STAY HOLED UP IN FEAR OF A SMALL NUMBER OF ENEMIES!
OUR ARMY NUMBERS 180,000 IN TOTAL! BETWEEN THAT DAMN RAJENDRA'S ARMY AND THE PARSIAN ARMY, THERE ARE ONLY 60,000 MEN!
IF WE WAIT HERE, THAT LEAVES THE REST OF OUR COUNTRY VULNERABLE TO RAJENDRA!
WE KNOW THAT THEY AIM TO ATTACK US HERE.
RATHER, WHY DON'T WE REMAIN ENTRENCHED HERE IN THE CAPITAL AND STAY ABREAST OF THEIR MOVEMENTS?


...MAHENDRA. SHALL WE SPLIT OUR ARMY INTO THREE GROUPS?
UGH ...!
WHAT ARE YOUR ORDERS, YOUR HIGHNESS?

IF WE DIVIDE OUR ARMY INTO THREE GROUPS, WE WILL LOSE THE ADVANTAGE WE HAVE IN NUMBERS.
YOU MUST BE JOKING, YOUR HIGHNESS.
ONE WOULD DEFEND THE CAPITAL, ONE WOULD FIGHT RAJENDRA, AND ONE WOULD FIGHT THE PARSIANS...

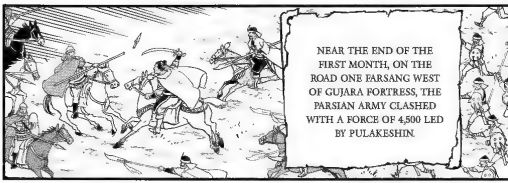

...IN WHERE WE SHOULD CONCENTRATE THE POWER WE HAVE.
THE DIFFICULTY LIES...
Y...YES/ OF COURSE ...!
WE CANNOT DIVIDE OUR MILITARY STRENGTH.
STRENGTH IS POWERFUL WHEN IT IS CONCENTRATED.


WE WILL AMASS THE NECESSARY PROVISIONS AND WEAPONS IN THAT PLACE AS WELL.
WE SHOULD POSITION THE REMAINDER OF OUR SOLDIERS ALL IN ONE PLACE, AND MOVE THEM AS NECESSARY.
WE MUST ALWAYS KEEP A MINIMUM NUMBER OF SOLDIERS IN THE CAPITAL.

HA HA HA HA HA
I AM PLEASED TO CALL YOU MY PRIME MINISTER AND MY FATHER-IN-LAW!
I AM HUMBLED BY YOUR PRAISE.

AHA. UNDERSTOOD!
MAHENDRA, YOU ARE TRULY FIT TO BE CALLED A SAGE.

"YOUR HIGHNESS."
...AH! THAT IS...
YOUR MAJESTY.
AND I AM HONORED THAT MY DAUGHTER SALIMA IS WIFE TO SUCH A WISE MAN.
GENERAL TARA, AND..
THE LORD OF THE FORTRESS IS GENERAL GOVIND, AND BENEATH HIM, TWO SECOND IN-COMMANDS
THE ONE CHOKE POINT DEFENDING THE ROAD STRETCHING FROM SINDHURA'S NORTHERN MOUNTAIN REGION TO ITS CAPITAL, URAIYUR.
GUJARAT FORTRESS
GUJARAT
PESHAWAR
URAIYUR

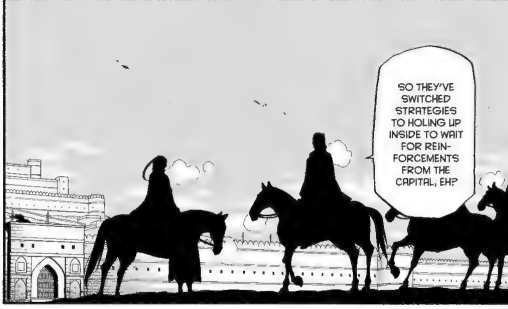

NEAR THE END OF THE FIRST MONTH, ON THE ROAD ONE FARSANG WEST OF GUJARA FORTRESS, THE PARSIAN ARMY CLASHED WITH A FORCE OF 4,500 LED BY PULAKESHIN.

*ABOUT FIVE KILOMETERS

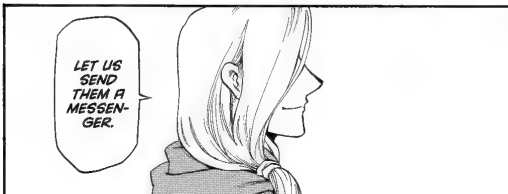
THRUNK
WHOA!
CLOP
!
CLEAR A PATH, PESTS!
I CARE TO TAKE ARSLAN'S HEAD ONLY!
YOU'RE IN MY WAY. MOVE!!

GRORSH
WHO IS THAT MAN!?
GENERAL PULAKE-SHIN!!

THAT WAS HIM?!
I HEARD IT WAS A BLACK KNIGHT ON A BLACK HORSE WHO KILLED GENERAL PULAKESHIN AT KAVERI RIVER!
RUMBLE
RE-TREAT !!
RETURN TO GUJARAT FORTRESS !!
PULL BACK !!
WHOOM


SO THEY'VE SWITCHED STRATEGIES TO HOLING UP INSIDE TO WAIT FOR REINFORCEMENTS FROM THE CAPITAL, EH?

I SEE. THE RAMPARTS ARE TALL AND THE MOAT IS DEEP. THEY'VE EVEN INSTALLED CATAPULTS.
TAKING THIS FORTRESS VIA A FRONTAL ATTACK WOULD NOT BE AN EASY FEAT.
WHAT DO WE DO?
THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO TAKE IT, BUT WE CANNOT TAKE TOO MUCH TIME.


LET US SEND THEM A MESSENGER.

HURRY UP AND STATE YOUR BUSINESS !!!
IF THEY ARE SENDING A MINSTREL AS A MESSENGER, IT WOULD SEEM THAT ARSLAN'S CAMP IS LACKING IN TALENTED OFFICERS.
GIEVE, HE SAID HIS NAME WAS?

I'VE COME TO ADVISE YOU TO SURRENDER TO US WITHOUT BLOODSHED.
OF COURSE, WE WILL NOT ASK IT OF YOU FOR NOTHING IN RETURN.
PRINCE RAJENDRA SAYS THAT WHEN HE TAKES THE CROWN, HE WILL RECEIVE THE BOTH OF YOU WARMLY.

IT IS THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO ASK FOR ANYTHING.
BE IT TITLE OR LAND, HE WILL SURELY GRANT YOU ALL YOU DESIRE.

IT DOESN'T MATTER. WE BACK GADHEVI.
WHAT DO YOU THINK?

KNOWING RAJENDRA, IS THERE ANY GUARANTEE THAT HE WOULD AND GIVE US THAT MUCH?
NO, WAIT.
A TOO-GOOD-TO-BE-TRUE OFFER HAS FALLEN INTO OUR LAPS.
"ALL WE DESIRE"
...

TRUE
...
CAN WE FEND THEM OFF?
BUT YOU SAW THE MIGHT OF THE PARSIAN ARMY.

?!
WHO'S THERE?!
PARDON ME.
SSHH
GIEVE'S COMPANION?
YOU...
I MUST SPEAK TO YOU, GENERALS.
THE PARSIAN ARMY'S OFFER IS A DISTRACTION.
THEIR TRUE AIM IS TO SLIP PAST YOUR FORTRESS IN THE DARK OF NIGHT...
...AND LAUNCH A SURPRISE ATTACK ON THE CAPITAL, URAIYUR!

ガヤガヤ
ガヤガヤ

!
THANK YOU FOR WAITING, LORD GIEVE.

OF COURSE.
IT'S A MATTER OF GRERT IMPOR-TANCE. THINK IT THROUGH VEERY CARE-FULLY.
TOO BAD
YOU'RE LEAVING ALREADY ?

WE NEED TO HAVE A LONG DISCUSSION BEFORE DECIDING ON AN ANSWER FOR PRINCE RAJENDRA.
MAY WE GIVE YOU OUR ANSWER TOMORROW?

CLASP
TOMORROW, THEN!
IS THAT JEWELRY ...?
YES... THE GODDESSES OF SINDHURA ARE TRULY GENEROUS.
UNTIL TOMORROW, I WILL BE COUNTING DOWN THE MINUTES UNTIL WE CAN MEET AGAIN.
SIR GIEVE, TAKE THIS WITH YOU, TOO!
TAKE MINE TOO!
THINK OF ME WHEN YOU LOOK AT THIS!

STUFF COTTON INTO THE MEN'S MOUTHS.
IS EVERY-THING READY??
WE WILL NOW PASS STRAIGHT IN FRONT OF GUJARAT FORTRESS AND MAKE FOR THE CAPITAL, VALLABHI.
DON'T MAKE A SOUND.
DON'T LET THE MEN IN THE FORTRESS NOTICE US..

THE CAVALRY-MEN HAVE ALREADY PASSED...

ONLY THE PROVISIONS UNIT WILL BE BEHIND THEM...

STILL HARD AT WORK IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT? HOW LAUDABLE, JASWANT.

I- LORD GIEVE ...
?!
OH, YES.
IT IS I, SIR GIEVE, ENEMY OF SINDHURRIN MEN.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE IN THE SHADOWS?
NOW ...

I... DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE...
IS THAT A FLARE TUCKED AWAY IN YOUR GARMENTS?
YOU'RE GOING TO GIVE THE SIGNAL FOR THE SINDHURAN ARMY TO AMBUSH US, AREN'T YOU?
YOU TREACHEROUS SNAKE.
WAIT!
LISTEN TO ME...

SLICE

OHO/ YOU DODGED IT?
YOU'RE NOT BAD.
SHOOK
SLICK

SWOOSH
SO YOU DRAW YOUR BLADE, BLACK CAT?
I'LL HAVE YOU SPIT OUT THE NAME OF YOUR TRUE MASTER.